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Citation for published version:

Pace, EJ, Binns, J, Alvarez, MP, Dalladay-Simpson, P, Gregoryanz, E & Howie, RT 2017, 'Synthesis and stability of hydrogen selenide compounds at high pressure', *The Journal of Chemical Physics*, vol. 147, no. 18, 184303. <https://doi.org/10.1063/1.5004242>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1063/1.5004242](https://doi.org/10.1063/1.5004242)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

The Journal of Chemical Physics

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Synthesis and stability of hydrogen selenide compounds at high pressure

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(Dated: 9 May 2019)

The observation of high-temperature superconductivity in hydride sulfide (H_2S) at high pressures has generated considerable interest in compressed hydrogen-rich compounds. High pressure hydrogen selenide (H_2Se) has also been predicted to be superconducting at high temperatures, however its behaviour and stability on compression remains unknown. In this study, we synthesize H_2Se *in situ* from elemental Se and molecular H_2 at pressures of 0.4 GPa and temperatures of 473 K. On compression at 300 K, we observe the high-pressure solid phase sequences (I-I'-IV) of H_2Se through Raman spectroscopy and x-ray diffraction measurements, before dissociation into its constituent elements. Through the compression of H_2Se in H_2 media, we observe the formation of a host-guest structure, $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$, which is stable, with respect to decomposition, at the same conditions as H_2Se . These measurements show that the behaviour of H_2Se is remarkably similar to that of H_2S , and provides further understanding of the hydrogen chalcogenides under pressure.

Keywords: High pressure, hydrogen selenide, hydrogen, raman spectroscopy, X-ray diffraction

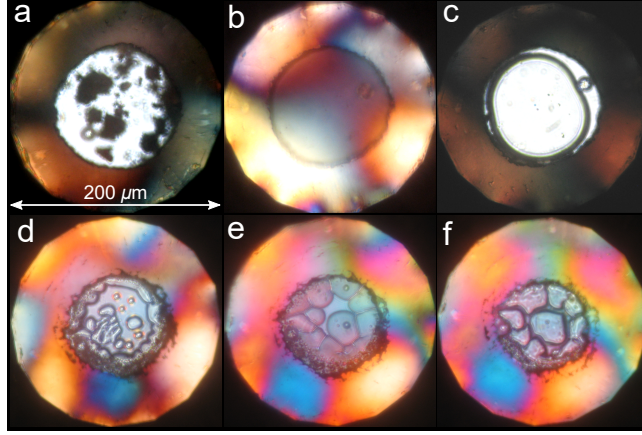


FIG. 1. (color online) Photomicrographs of the synthesis of H_2Se in a diamond-anvil cell sample chamber. The sample chamber is formed by a rhenium gasket. a) H_2 and solid Se at 0.4 GPa and room temperature b) H_2Se - H_2 mixture at 0.4 GPa and 473 K c) Liquid phase separation of H_2Se (central bubble) and H_2 (surrounding area) at 0.4 GPa and room temperature after heating d) H_2Se beginning to solidify e) slow coalescence of H_2Se regions f) completely solidified H_2Se at 1.5 GPa

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent claim of high-temperature superconductivity in hydrogen sulfide at megabar pressures has drawn attention back to the formation of hydrides with exotic properties.¹ The superconductive mechanism, composition, structure, and stability field of sulfur hydride at high pressures has been extensively investigated, although decisive conclusions have yet to be reached.^{2–10} Despite this interest and predictions of high T_c superconductivity, the heavier hydrogen chalcogenides (*i.e.* H_2Se and H_2Te) remain experimentally unexplored.^{11,12}

H_2Se is known to form from the direct reaction between Se and H_2 at high temperature. However, experimental studies are limited, with only an ambient pressure low temperature investigations into the solid state.^{13–16} As the heavier sister molecule to hydrogen sulfide, hydrogen selenide is likely to exhibit similar behaviour at high pressure, with theoretical studies finding similarities in the solid phases in the megabar regime.^{11,17}

H_2S exhibits three solid phases between pressures of 0.5 GPa and 27 GPa, at 300 K; transitioning from a rotationally disordered solid (I-I'), to an ordered hydrogen-bonded structure (IV), before dissociating.^{18–26} To date there have been no experimental high-pressure investigations of H_2Se , but the low-temperature ambient-pressure studies find strong similarities

in the crystal structures and Raman characteristics of phases I - III with their corresponding phases in H_2S .^{14,16} Mixtures of H_2S and H_2 are known to form $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$, a host-guest compound at pressures as low as 3.5 GPa.²⁷ High T_c superconductivity has been predicted in high pressure simulations of both H_2S and the $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$ compound.^{28,29} Combined experimental and theoretical efforts have identified the high- T_c phase as an H_3S compound, with a maximum T_c of 203 K at 155 GPa.^{1,8,29} With Se being larger and slightly less electronegative, computational studies predict lower stability with respect to pressure, but suggest the formation of superconducting phases H_3Se and HSe above ~ 120 GPa, with maximum T_c estimated between 110-130 K.^{11,17} To further understand the predicted exotic phenomena it is important to first investigate the formation and high-pressure stability of H_2Se , and to compare the behaviour with that of the extensively studied H_2S .

In this study, we report the direct synthesis of H_2Se from its constituent elements at conditions of 0.4 GPa and ~ 473 K. We find that phase I of H_2Se undergoes a phase transition at 12 GPa, similar to the transition to phase IV in H_2S . In H_2 -rich mixtures, we observe the formation of a host-guest $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ structure above 4.2 GPa. This compound is identified by characteristic vibrational Raman spectra differing from pure H_2Se . The structure and stoichiometry of this compound were confirmed through x-ray diffraction measurements whereby we find $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ to crystallize in a body-centered tetragonal structure, space group $I4/mcm$, analogous to that observed in $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$. Both H_2Se and $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ are stable to 24 GPa at 300 K, after which both decompose into their constituent elements.

II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

At ambient condition H_2Se is a highly toxic and flammable gas. Such hazards can be avoided by the direct synthesis of H_2Se from Se and fluid H_2 in a diamond-anvil cell. Moreover, this technique also allows precise control of the ratio of H_2Se to H_2 . High purity selenium (99.999%) was loaded into a diamond-anvil cell with a small chip of ruby and subsequently gas loaded with research grade hydrogen (99.9999%) at 0.2 GPa (Fig. 1a).³⁰ Rhenium gaskets were used to form the sample chamber in all experimental runs. Sample sizes ranged between 100 to 125 μm once in the solid state. Once loaded, Se- H_2 mixtures were then compressed to 0.4 GPa and heated to 473 K for at least 2 hours until all the Se had reacted (Fig. 1b). On slowly cooling to room temperature, liquid H_2Se was obtained

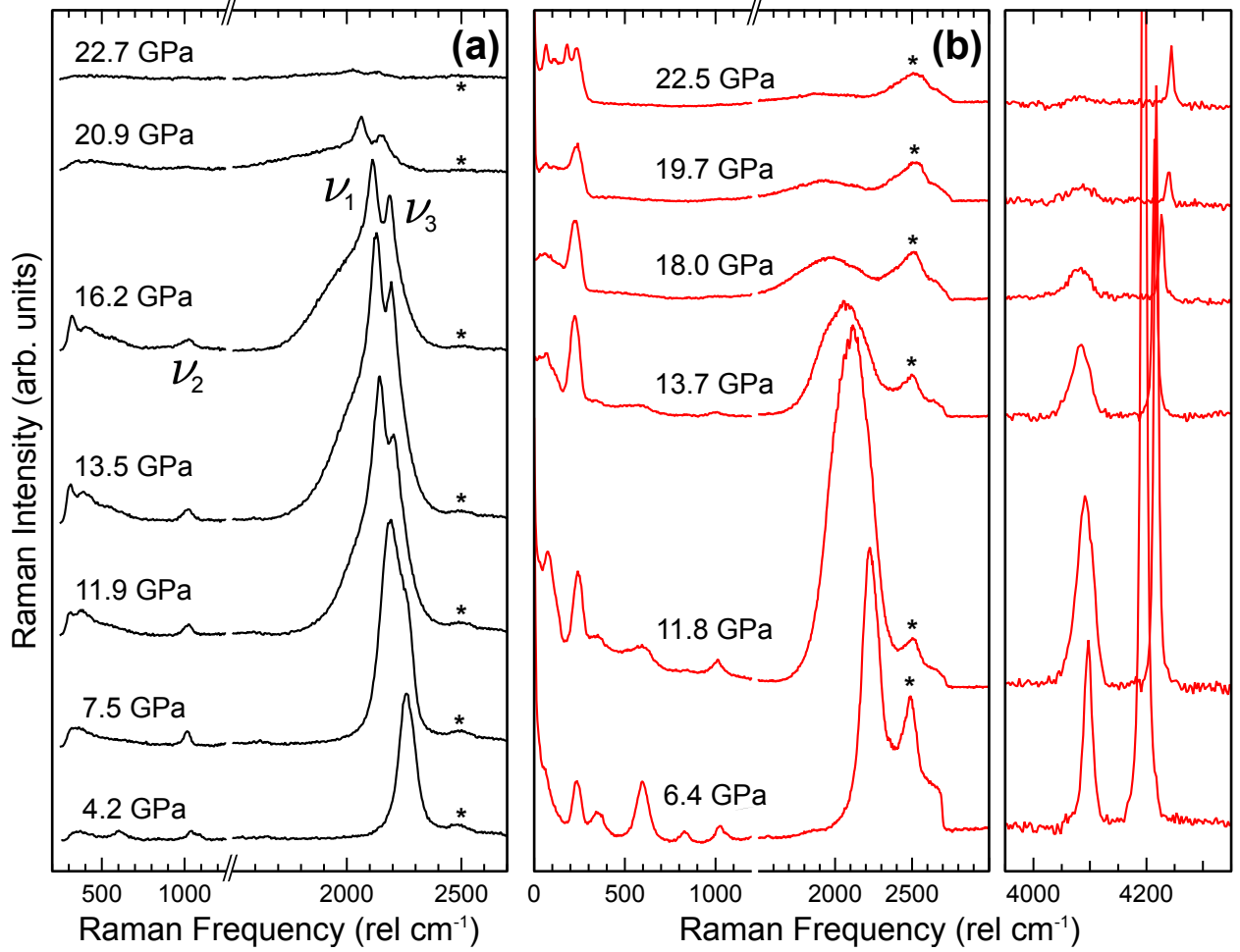


FIG. 2. a) Representative Raman spectra of H_2Se on compression at 300 K (black) b) Representative Raman spectra of $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})\text{H}_2$ formed from a H_2 -rich mixture at 300 K (red). The second order diamond is indicated by *.

with clear phase separation from fluid H_2 , as a consequence of non-stoichiometry (Fig. 1c). We found that heating was necessary to promote the reaction of Se and H_2 . Leaving Se- H_2 mixtures at pressures between 0.2 GPa and 3 GPa for one month did not promote synthesis at room temperature.

H_2Se is very sensitive to both laser light and x-ray synchrotron radiation, which cause the sample to decompose and precautions were taken during data acquisition. Raman spectroscopy measurements were made using a custom-built micro-focused Raman system.^{31,32} The laser power of the system was kept below 10 mW to prevent decomposition of the sample to Se and H_2 , with laser exposure minimized. We have found that 647 nm laser emission was favorable over shorter wavelengths and did not cause any degradation of the

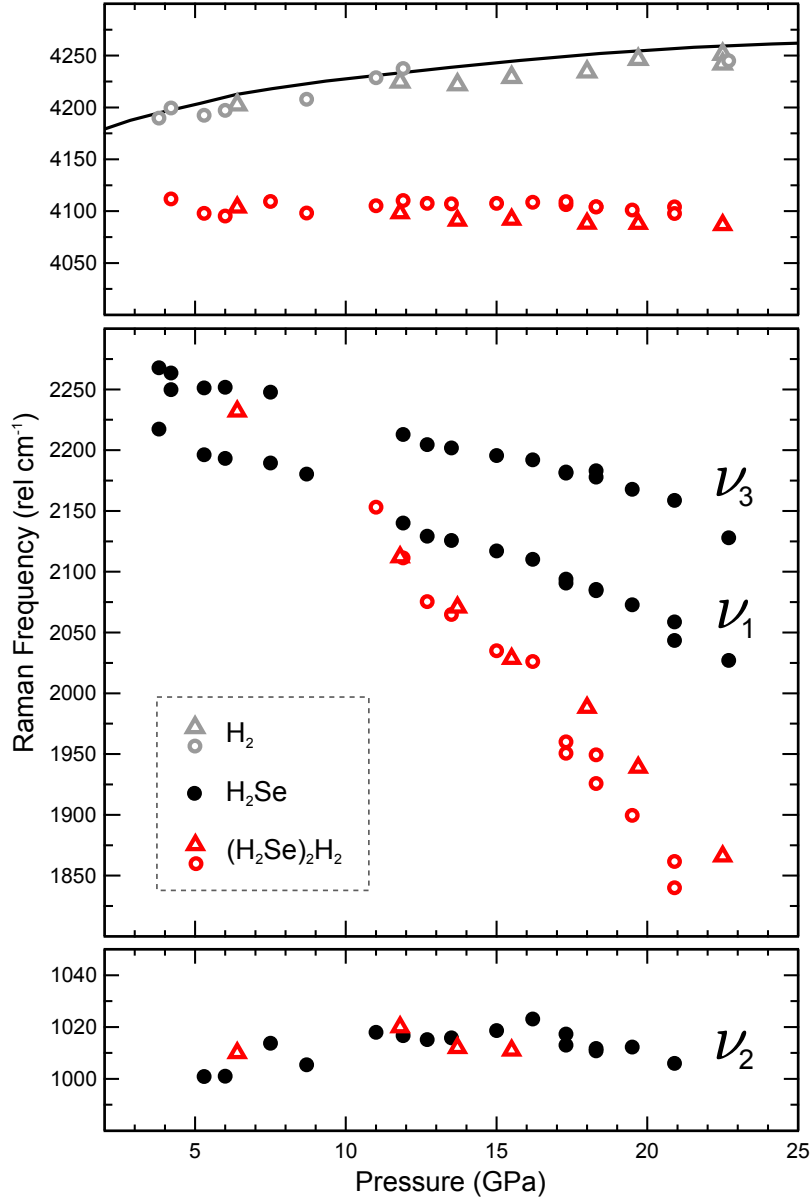


FIG. 3. V

ibrational Raman frequencies of H₂Se (black closed circles), (H₂Se)₂H₂ (red open circles/triangles) and H₂ (grey open circles/triangles) as functions of pressure. Filled circles, open circles and open triangles correspond to different experimental runs. Top panel: Vibrational modes of excess hydrogen (grey symbols) and hydrogen molecules within (H₂Se)₂H₂ (red). Solid black line corresponds to measurements of pure H₂. Middle Panel: Symmetrical, ν_1 , and asymmetrical, ν_3 , stretching modes of H₂Se (black) and the corresponding modes within (H₂Se)₂H₂ (red). Bottom Panel: The ν_2 molecular bending mode of H₂Se (black) and the corresponding mode within (H₂Se)₂H₂ (red)

sample during data acquisition. We found that the sample in the liquid state was much more prone to laser damage, thus measurements were collected above pressures of 3.8 GPa. x-ray diffraction data were collected at beamline 16-IDB at the Advanced Photon Source (USA). Angle-dispersive x-ray diffraction patterns were recorded on a Pilatus 1M-F image-plate detector with micro-focused synchrotron radiation of 30 keV. Data were integrated with DIPTAS³³ to yield intensity *vs.* 2θ plots. Patterns were indexed with GSAS-II³⁴, Le Bail³⁵ refinements were carried out in JANA2006.³⁶ Exposure of H₂Se to synchrotron x-ray radiation resulted in the formation of amorphous Se at the point of exposure, requiring the acquisition of data from a different sample position at each pressure point. Powder quality was very poor in all samples excluding the possibility of Rietveld profile refinement.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On compression above 1 GPa, H₂Se began to nucleate in fluid H₂ (see Fig. 1d-f) with full crystallization occurring by pressures of 1.5 GPa (Fig. 1g). Strong vibrational modes are observed in the Raman spectra, the most intense being the symmetrical ν_1 and asymmetrical ν_3 stretching modes, shown in Fig. 2a. In phase I, these modes appear as a single broad band (~ 2250 cm⁻¹ at 2.5 GPa). The ν_2 molecular bending mode, observed at frequencies of ~ 1010 cm⁻¹, is largely unaffected by pressure due to the ‘bent’ molecular geometry. The behaviour of the vibrational Raman spectra of H₂Se is very similar to that of H₂S but shifted to lower frequencies. In Phase I, the Raman frequencies of ν_1 and ν_3 of H₂Se differ by 300 cm⁻¹ compared with the equivalent modes of H₂S, whilst the bending mode differs by 175 cm⁻¹ (see Fig. 3).^{26,39} In all our experimental runs, H₂Se tended to form multiple single crystals (see inset Fig. 4), however due to the sensitivity of the sample to synchrotron x-ray exposure, it was difficult to acquire data capable of refining a structure. Despite this, we were able to determine the structure of H₂Se at 4.1 GPa, confirming that H₂Se crystallizes into cubic phase-I ($Fm\bar{3}m$, $a = 5.424(3)$ Å), shown in Fig. 4. The structure of phase I of H₂Se is equivalent to that of phase I H₂S.¹⁸

At pressures of 7.7 GPa, the unresolved ν_1 and ν_3 modes begin to differ in intensity, with ν_1 being the more intense. This was determined previously for H₂S to indicate transformation to an intermediate phase I’.³⁹ Above pressures of 12 GPa, there is a further transformation to phase IV, characterised by the splitting of ν_1 and ν_3 from a reduction in

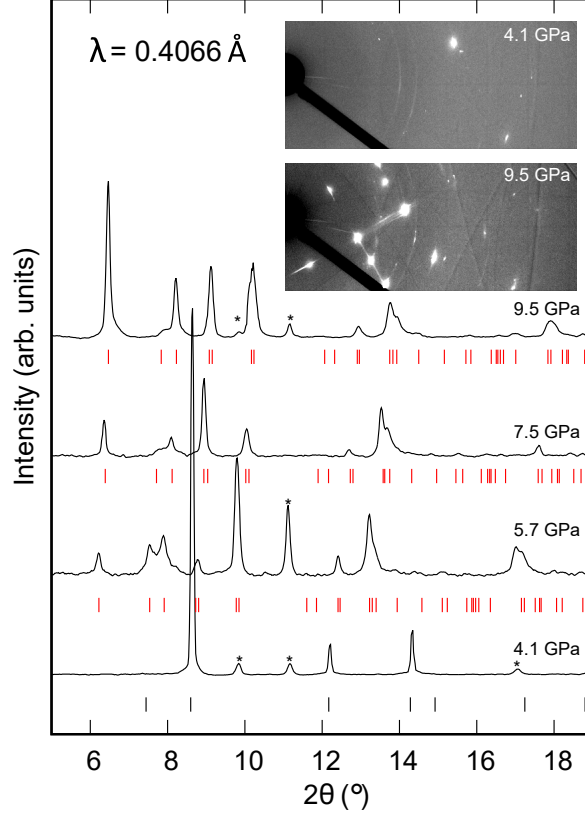


FIG. 4. X-ray diffraction data for H_2Se and $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ at high pressures. Below 4.1 GPa diffraction spots due to phase I H_2Se are observed (black tick marks). Above 4.1 GPa, diffraction spots corresponding to the hydrogen-bonded compound $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ are observed up to pressures of 14.9 GPa (red tick marks). Peaks marked with (*) are due to the Re gasket. Inset: Single crystal-like x-ray diffraction patterns of H_2Se at 4.1 GPa and $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ at 9.5 GPa, the latter of which includes significant streaks of diffuse scattering.

peak width and increase in intensity. The asymmetrical stretching mode, ν_3 , is higher in frequency by 860 cm^{-1} compared with ν_1 . Due to the instability of the sample to synchrotron x-ray exposure, we were unable to confirm a structural transition to phase I' or IV in H_2Se through x-ray diffraction analysis, however the Raman characteristics of the transitions are identical to that observed in H_2S . On further compression above 20 GPa, we see the reduced intensity of all vibrational modes, and the crystallites visibly darken as H_2Se dissociates into its constituent elements. The decomposition is complete by 24 GPa and at 30 GPa, the x-ray diffraction measurements showed only incommensurate monoclinic Se-IV, whilst Raman measurements show only the characteristic Raman spectrum of Se and H_2 . In H_2S ,

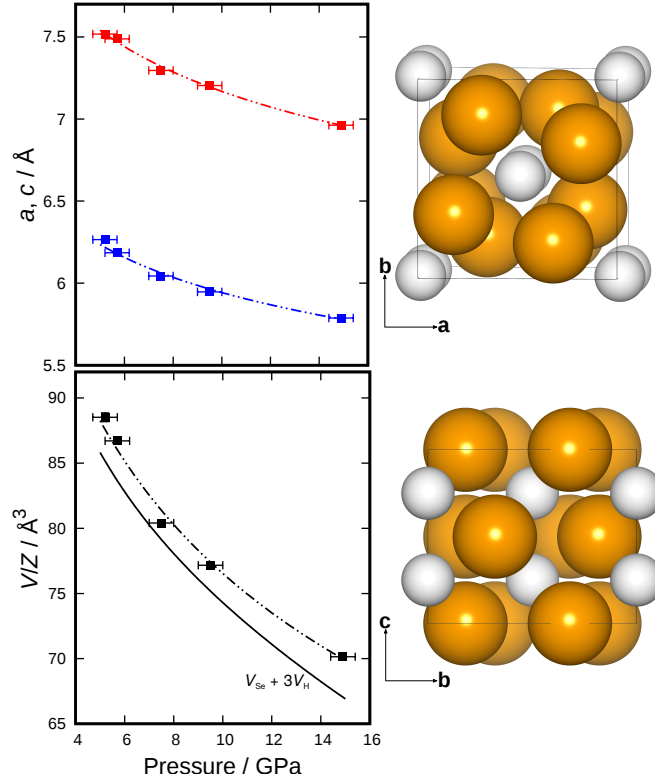


FIG. 5. a) Changes in unit-cell dimensions for $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ as a function of pressure (a - red, c - blue). b) V/Z as a function of pressure for $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$. Solid line indicates volume calculated according to the atomic equations of state for H_2 ³⁷ and Se .³⁸ c) and d) Structure of $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ viewed down the c and a axes illustrating the layered nature of the compound.

the dissociation at 300 K occurs from ~ 27 – 50 GPa,^{23,24} the onset being slightly higher than that observed here in H_2Se , although over a much greater pressure range. Given the reduced X -H bond strength, it is unsurprising that H_2Se decomposes at lower pressure and within a much smaller pressure range than H_2S ; hence one would expect H_2Te to decompose at even lower pressure, if it can be stabilized at all at room temperature. This successive reduction of hydride decomposition pressure throughout group 16 reflects the trend observed in the hydrogen halides, where HCl is stable to at least 50 GPa, with HBr and HI decomposing at 42 GPa and 10 GPa respectively.^{40–42}

In all sample concentrations we studied with excess H_2 , we observed partial or full formation of an $\text{H}_2\text{Se}-\text{H}_2$ compound above pressures of 4.2 GPa, which we identify as $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$. Full formation of H_2Se was observed in samples with high H_2 concentration, as demon-

strated in our x-ray diffraction measurements (Fig. 2b). The formation was initially identified through the appearance of a second vibrational mode assigned to H_2 within the newly formed compound (see Fig. 2b). This mode is $\sim 100 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ lower in frequency compared with pure H_2 and has different frequency pressure dependence. The ν_1 and ν_3 modes of H_2Se also behave very differently in the compound than in H_2Se , whereby we observe no splitting at phase IV conditions, and the modes soften rapidly with pressure above 12 GPa. These observations are very similar to the Raman characteristics for $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$ above 17 GPa, which was synthesized in $\text{H}_2\text{S}-\text{H}_2$ mixtures.²⁷ To confirm that this is an analogous compound is formed in $\text{H}_2\text{Se}-\text{H}_2$ mixtures, we have performed x-ray diffraction measurements (see Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). Due to the sample sensitivity to synchrotron x-ray exposure and propensity to form large single-crystal grains, it was difficult to collect high-quality diffraction patterns, however we were able to obtain a sufficient number reflections to allow indexing to a body-centered tetragonal structure, space group $I4/mcm$ with $a = 7.518(4)$, $c = 6.266(4) \text{ \AA}$ at 5.2 GPa and unit-cell dimensions could be extracted to 14.9 GPa (see Fig. 5). The significant diffuse scattering observed is strongly suggestive of hindered rotational disorder in the H_2Se molecules.⁴³

It is interesting that changes in volume per formula unit (V/Z) with pressure shows $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ adopts a volume marginally greater (3% on average) than the sum of its constituent elements (solid line Fig. 5(b)). This is an indication that $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ is highly unstable, which is in agreement with our other observations. It is notable that the volume difference increases with pressure, reflecting the increased instability of $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ relative to decomposition into Se and H_2 with increasing pressure. Similar behaviour is observed in pure H_2Se at pressure, at 4.1 GPa we observe $V/Z = 39.887(4) \text{ \AA}^3$, while the volume calculated from the constituent elements is $V/Z = 37.321 \text{ \AA}^3$. This behaviour, although highly unusual, is not unique; recently we have reported on the equation of state of HI, another highly unstable compound under pressure, which appears to have an experimentally determined V/Z 7.3% greater than that calculated from I and H.⁴²

On compression, we do not see any evidence for further phase transitions in $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$, such as the ordering transition observed in $(\text{H}_2\text{S})_2\text{H}_2$. Instead, $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ starts to decompose at exactly the same pressure conditions as H_2Se observing the reduced intensity of the vibrational modes. At pressures approaching 22.5 GPa, the sample visibly phase separates, the transparent $(\text{H}_2\text{Se})_2\text{H}_2$ crystals become dark and metallic, which shows the characteris-

tic low frequency modes of Se (see Fig. 2b), with the remaining sample being transparent molecular hydrogen.

Recent x-ray synchrotron measurements have suggested that high- T_c superconducting H_2S could be due to the formation of H_3S , which reforms upon partial decomposition of H_2S at high pressure.^{8–10} Our study demonstrates that H_2Se and H_2Se-H_2 mixtures behave very similar to that of H_2S and H_2S-H_2 at high pressure and 300 K. It is very plausible that H_2Se may be stabilised at low temperatures, and if H_3S is indeed the thermodynamically stable phase at high pressure, hydrogen selenide could potentially also form H_3Se . Given that the behaviour of H_2S above 100 GPa is not completely understood,^{2–10} experiments on H_2Se at the conditions in which superconductivity is predicted could prove very insightful for all the hydrogen chalcogenides.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by a research grant from the U.K. Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. Portions of this work were performed at HPCAT (Sector 16), Advanced Photon Source (APS), Argonne National Laboratory. HPCAT operations are supported by DOE-NNSA under Award No. DE-NA0001974, with partial instrumentation funding by NSF. The Advanced Photon Source is a U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science User Facility operated for the DOE Office of Science by Argonne National Laboratory under Contract No. DE-AC02-06CH11357. The authors thank Ross Hrubiak for his assistance.

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